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UNCLAS MANILA 001199

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

DEPARTMENT FOR S/CT, INL/AAE, EAP/PMBS, INR/EAP
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E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PTER](#) [CASC](#) [KCRM](#) [PREL](#) [RP](#)

SUBJECT: PNP STORMS PRISON ENDING ASG TAKEOVER

REF: MANILA 1183

Summary

1. (SBU) Philippine National Police (PNP) anti-terrorist and SWAT forces stormed the Metro Manila District Jail at 9:15 a.m. (local time) on March 15 after a negotiated agreement with Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG) inmates broke down late the previous evening. PNP National Capital Region Director Avelino Razon confirms a total of 21 inmates died during the assault including notorious ASG leaders, Commanders Kosovo, Robot, and Global. Six PNP members were wounded in the two-hour fight. As of 11:00 a.m., major assault operations ended with the prisoners cordoned off on the prison rooftop for processing back into custody. End Summary.

Negotiations Break Down Over Details Of Deal

2. (SBU) Although GRP representatives and ASG prisoners had signed a preliminary agreement on March 14 to end the standoff at the Manila District Prison (ref A), the deal broke down when the inmates said they wanted to eat first. "We are demanding that they buy us food," detainee spokesman Hazdi Daie (alias Ka Lando) told the Associated Press by telephone. Razon countered with a statement to the press: "If they will surrender, lay down their arms and come out, they will get food."

3. (SBU) According to PNP officials, the ASG prisoners continued to change their demands after this first snag in the agreement. Although negotiations continued through the night, PNP Public Information Officer Leopoldo Bataoil told poloff Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) Governor Parouk Hussin recommended to the crisis management group headed by Secretary Angelo Reyes of the Department of Interior and Local Government (DILG) that negotiations should only continue until March 15. ASG insistence on airing their grievances in a primetime broadcast and other last minute changes to the signed agreement appeared to stretch the patience of security officials on the scene. Prior to the assault, police sources told poloff they were worried the inmates were stalling for time and might further arm themselves by breaking into the prison's armory.

Ultimatum And Assault End With 21 Dead Inmates

3. (SBU) At 9:00 a.m. on March 15 DILG Secretary Reyes issued an ultimatum for the inmates to surrender in 15 minutes. The standoff was broadcast live on local television. At 9:15 a.m. several light armored vehicles and SWAT formations, using water cannons, assault rifles, and "flash-bang" and tear gas grenades, stormed the four-story prison building controlled by the ASG terrorists.

4. (SBU) As of 11:00 a.m. assault teams had complete control of the situation, and had cordoned off the estimated 470 inmates on the building's rooftop. Police led manageable groups of inmates under armed guard for "processing" (i.e., strip searches and head counts) back into prison custody. Canine units assisted in room clearing operations. Razon confirmed to the media that as many as 21 inmates had been killed in the assault, including the ASG's Commanders Kosovo, Robot, and Global. Police recovered eight firearms from the prisoners. As many as six PNP officers were wounded, sustaining minor injuries. Reyes stressed separately to the media that any further attempts to subvert prison security would be met with similar harsh measures. He noted an investigation is planned to examine the wider circumstances of the prison standoff.

5. (SBU) Comment: While the operation to retake the prison went fairly smoothly and quickly, the fact that inmates were able to take over underscores the serious failures of the Philippine prison system. Our GRP sources have confirmed media reports that Bureau of Jail Management and Penology (BJMP) officials received intelligence reports of a possible uprising at least three weeks ago. The crisis represents an opportunity for the government to institute badly needed

reforms. Whether it will do so, however, remains an open question. End Comment.
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